

Call for Papers

Special Issue of the *Zeitschrift für Soziologie (ZfS)*

Cultural Practices and Processes of Transnational and Global Inequalities

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Most work on social inequality takes the nation state as a frame of reference (Beck 2007). This focus has been challenged in recent years, as processes of globalization and regional integration have led to increasing interconnectedness across national borders, with clear distributive consequences (Weiß 2017). These processes shape the social positions of individuals and groups and generate inequality relations that stretch across national and regional borders, for example, in transnational education and labor markets. In addition, processes of globalization and regional integration change how individuals understand and evaluate their social position (Delhey and Kohler 2006). As a consequence, scholars have called for moving beyond the nation state as the taken-for-granted frame of reference and for studying relations of inequality at the transnational, regional (Beckfield 2019), or global level (Wallerstein 2004; Milanovic 2016), and with respect to heterogeneous but overlapping social contexts of differentiation (Weiß 2017) – like global social fields (Buchholz 2022) or global cities (Warikoo 2011).

With this special issue, we seek to contribute to this research agenda by exploring how *cultural practices and processes* (Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014) contribute to the (re-)production of transnational and global inequality relations. Two sets of (closely related) cultural practices and processes are particularly relevant for this special issue: (1) categorization and valuation as well as (2) narratives and justifications (Valentino and Vaisey 2022).

(1) *Practices of categorization and valuation*: How people sort themselves and others into social categories (such as social class, gender, race, ethnicity etc.) and how they attribute worth to members of these categories has important consequences for their life chances (Tilly 1998; Brubaker 2015). Categorization and related practices such as symbolic boundary-making (Lamont and Molnár 2002) are fundamental to social closure and opportunity hoarding of groups. However, much of this research neglects trans-

situational contexts (Waibel, Peetz, and Meier 2021). We still know little about how dynamics of categorization and valuation shape (and are shaped by) transnational, regional and global relations of inequality. For instance, given the continuing centrality of the nation state, how does the category of “nationality” relate to other social categories within transnational and global relations? How are the rules of global fields influencing situated practices of valuation and vice versa – and how are they related to the socially differentiated contexts in which inequalities materialize (Weiß 2017)? What are the consequences of standardization (Lampland and Star 2009) on global inequalities?

(2) *Narratives and justifications*: How people judge inequalities and the conclusions they draw from these judgements depend on how they make sense of inequalities and what they believe is fair. In doing so they rely on culturally embedded narratives like the “American dream” and draw on notions of fairness or meritocratic criteria (Mijs 2019). These narratives and justice beliefs form part of what have also been called “orders of worth” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) or “moral economies” of inequality (Mau 2003; Svallfors 2006; Sachweh 2012). However, research on these issues has typically addressed perceptions and justifications of social inequalities within countries. We still know little about how people and organizations make sense of transnational, regional and global inequalities and what justice beliefs they hold regarding these relations.

The main aim of this special issue is to theorize and empirically analyze how such cultural practices and processes structure (and are structured by) transnational, regional and global inequalities. While the contributions will be united by this analytical focus, they may analyze diverse empirical phenomena. The following three topics are examples of empirical areas of research that offer promising insights.

(1) *International migration and mobility*: In a world where access to resources continues to be tied to citizenship and residence rights (Shachar 2009; Milanovic 2016), movement across borders is an important avenue of social mobility. Accordingly, states’ citizenship, migration and border policies have consequences for global inequalities (Mau 2023; Recchi et al. 2021; Harpaz 2019). Gatekeeping mechanisms like hiring decisions within transnational social fields and organizations that enable or restrict international migration and mobility can also play a role (Gerhards, Hans, and Drewski 2018). Papers in this area could address the categorizations and valuations shaping – and the justifications provided for – international migration and mobility chances.

(2) *Emergence of transnational social groups and classes*: There is ample evidence the upper social classes and elites take advantage of globalization to exercise “social-spatial autonomy” (Weiß 2017) and to enjoy associated benefits (Gerhards, Hans, and Carlson 2014; Surak 2023). In particular multinational corporations, international organizations, and professional fields offer opportunities for these actors (Drewski 2021). Research has asked whether the individuals engaged in these fields and organizations coalesce into a new “transnational social class” that distinguishes itself from social classes rooted in the

nation state (Sklair 2001; Hartmann 2016; Carlson and Barglowski 2024; Cousin and Chauvin 2021). Papers in this area could examine the categorization struggles and practices of distinction surrounding the emergence of these groups.

(3) *Transnational and global social fields*: Scholars have observed the emergence of transnational and global “social fields”, which are delimited spheres of practice with specific “rules of the game” governing the distribution of rewards that have become partly autonomous from the jurisdiction of nation states (Buchholz 2022; Go and Krause 2017). Within these fields, regimes of valuation are promoted that can re-shape the attribution of worth as well as the perception of inequality in important ways, such as global university rankings (Brankovic 2025; Espeland and Sauder 2016). Scholars have also studied relations of inequality within various transnational fields of cultural production (Buchholz 2022; Heilbron 1999). Papers in this area could examine the global practices that constitute fields and contribute to their relations of inequality as well as the narratives and justice beliefs promoted within such transnational and global fields. In addition, they could investigate how different global fields interact, how they relate to fields at other levels (like the nation state or organizations), and how the interferences between fields contribute to social inequalities.

Please submit abstracts (1–2 pages, in English or German language) by October 31, 2026, to the guest editors. In the initial review phase, submissions will be evaluated for their relevance to the special issue. Authors of selected abstracts will be invited to submit full manuscripts by May 31, 2027. A (virtual) workshop for contributors will take place in July 2027. Following this, all submissions will be submitted to the standard double-blind peer review process of *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* by December 2027. Upon acceptance, the articles will be published online ahead of print; the special issue is expected to be published in print in Spring 2029.

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